



A PHASE  
OF  
THE INDIAN STRUGGLE

BY  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee

1942

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*“A subtle but effective system of terrorism and an organised display of force on the one hand and the deprivation of all powers of retaliation or self-defence on the other have emasculated the people. Not only have the reforms not made a change of heart, but they are only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging her servitude.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

(From his written statement made before Mr. C. N. Broomefield, I.C.S., Sessions Judge, Ahmedabad, in March, 1922).



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## PUBLISHER'S APOLOGIA

In introducing these letters to the public the publisher need offer little apology. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee is one of the foremost nationalist leaders of India and at present the only personality who guides public opinion in Bengal. The letters, he addressed, as a Minister, to His Excellency the Viceroy and to the Governor of Bengal at moments of great national importance are self-explanatory. In these Dr. Mookerjee has directed the searchlight on the actual working of the present constitution which has been characterised in official language as Dominion Status in action. Though written at different times the letters are really ~~united~~ and reveal Dr. Mookerjee's experience as a Minister in one of the foremost Indian ~~Parliaments~~. They are unique in the history of India's ~~political~~ struggle in as much as in them for the first time a responsible Minister under the so-called ~~present~~ ~~constitution~~ boldly challenges the iron ~~rule~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~British~~ ~~Government~~ still maintains over the ~~administration~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~country~~ and exposes how Indian ~~ministers~~ ~~have~~ ~~been~~ ~~entrusted~~ ~~with~~ ~~the~~ ~~great~~ ~~responsibilities~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~country~~ ~~and~~ ~~how~~ ~~they~~ ~~have~~ ~~been~~ ~~unable~~ ~~to~~ ~~control~~ ~~State~~ ~~policy~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~interests~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~country~~.



The issues raised in these letters are of more than provincial interest. They throw a flood of light on the real significance of the present political struggle in the country. At present India is passing through one of the darkest hours of crisis in her political history. We are all groping to find out a solution. The documents included in this booklet may clarify to some extent the Indian situation and help to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the country's freedom.

MONOJENDRA NATH BHOWMIK

Kusthia, Nadia,  
*15th December, 1942.*

## MOMENTOUS ISSUE

(March 7, 1942)

MY DEAR SIR JOHN HERBERT,

As you will be leaving for Delhi this afternoon may I invite your attention to some important problems vitally affecting our future at this critical juncture. I am doing so in the hope that you may have an opportunity of discussing the matters with His Excellency the Viceroy and also His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief.

I yield to none in my anxiety to see that we are not enveloped in a state of defeatism, but this does not mean that you or we can or should ignore the realities of the present grave situation. For nearly two hundred years we have had nothing to do with the task of organising the military defence of India. The British Government and its chosen representatives took upon themselves the responsibility for protecting India from foreign aggression. India's wealth has been lavishly spent for this purpose. We have been kept unarmed and untrained. No Indian representative has had anything to do with the Military policy of India. Since the war broke out in 1939, we were repeatedly told that India had to fight her war by defending the outer walls of this country, such as the Middle East or the Far East, specially Singapore. Recruitment of an Indian Home Army

for the defence of India has not been accepted. Actually however when the crisis has come to-day, the outer walls have broken down and the British Prime Minister has declared with unconcealed frankness that practically we are at the mercy of the enemy, and if we survive 1942, something may happen to save us in 1943.

The fact that everywhere in the Far East the enemy is finally proving superior to ourselves is a terrible blow to British prestige. If we could have resisted somewhere and beaten down the enemy, something might have been said to keep alive British prestige. Over and above this, the scorched earth theory, which is being applied in practice elsewhere is capable of most serious consequences in India. This means that if military resistance fails, important zones will be destroyed by our efforts so that the enemy may not get any advantage whatsoever. This was done in some parts of Russia. But there the people did this themselves after a relentless fight under national command.

You should impress upon the Viceroy that even at this late hour there should be an immediate settlement between England and India so that Indians may spontaneously feel that it is really a people's war. A strong representative national government with power to direct the defence policy of India in India's paramount interest has to be set up immediately if we are to win the war.

It is only a Chinese Generalissimo that has inspired the Chinese people to fight the enemy to the last man. It is a Stalin and his compatriots—Russia's chosen men—that have stirred Russia to unprecedented bravery. It is a Churchill, your own man, that gives you the clarion call at the hour of crisis. Your constitution permits the people of your country, acting through their representatives, to demand change of horses even in mid-stream. Prime Minister and Ministers whom the country does not want are quietly got rid of in pursuance of genuine public demand. Here, on the other hand, real power is in the hands of an irresponsible bureaucracy whom we cannot remove if we consider such removal to be imperative in *our* national interest.

I have placed before you a number of times my proposal that we should be given the power to raise a Home Army for the defence of Bengal. People may join this army without being compelled to sign a bond that they are liable to be sent anywhere that the authorities may choose. You did not agree that this condition could be waived. Whatever may have been the argument in favour of this condition in the past, to-day when a grave danger has almost reached our door and your resources are hopelessly limited, there can be no reason why we should not be allowed to raise our Home Army for the defence of our own motherland. Australia has done so and the stirring words of the Australian Prime Minister

présent a wide difference from the policy pursued in India. I am sure that if the British authorities make this little gesture even at this late hour, this will capture the imagination of the people in an effective manner. The argument which is used by every educated Indian to-day is that we wish to defend our country but we can neither raise our own army nor have the necessary arms and ammunitions.

Your objection to raise a Home Army for Bengal even at a critical time like the present, is that this is entirely against the Indian Army Policy. My reply is that to-day that policy must be determined first and foremost in the interests of India. If it is necessary for the defence of Bengal or India that the Bengal Home Army may have to be sent out of Bengal, that will be done. But that will be done in a clear-cut co-ordinated manner, not by expanding in an unreasonable measure the theory of India defending the outer walls of the country at the sacrifice of threatened areas in Bengal or other parts of India. We want that Bengal should be defended to-day by Bengalee soldiers to as large an extent as possible, supplemented by other Indian soliders, if necessary, and only as a last step, by non-Indian soldiers. Your next objection is that sufficient arms and ammunitions are not available. I shall not waste your time by asking whose fault it is that there is no larger production of equipments for India's use to-day, but I shall say this that we shall arrange for increased

production to the best of our ability and shall give training to our Home Army with such limited arms as may be available to-day. Here again, pray recall to your mind the stirring appeal made by Madame Chiang Kai Shek and also the Australian Prime Minister. China's supply of arms and ammunitions was extremely limited and the lady declared with commendable pride that when the Chinese people started fighting Japan, they had nothing but their hands, their flesh and their blood. The Australian Prime Minister said that they had also suffered from lack of arms and when they started reorganising their Home Army, they had to use broom-sticks at one stage of the training. Such objections as you have raised are indeed of no value at this critical hour. Difficulties there are undoubtedly. I shall not even ask who has been responsible for India's helplessness, provided we really go ahead with a new policy. Difficulties must be faced and surmounted boldly, if we are to survive this crisis. The real obstacle will be want of trust. Are you prepared to trust us even to-day? The verdict of history will be against you if you deny us the elementary right of raising our Army according to our needs. Either, you say that you will protect us and military defence of an adequate measure will be available at the required time—this answer may be humiliating to the national sentiment of India who asks for the exercise of the right of self-defence; but even then an assurance of this character

will have considerable practical importance. Or if you cannot give us the assurance that India will be saved, why should there be a hesitation on your part in allowing the people of the land to defend themselves in such manner, as they consider best even at this last hour? Let India's interests be the supreme factor to-day and let Indians themselves decide how best to tackle the grave peril into which you have thrown us.

You will ask how will such an army save Bengal from air attacks at this eleventh hour. If we can strengthen our own Air Force, a fight may be given. But is it not quite possible that Japan may some day in near future land in Bengal and if that happens, we may have to face the brutal realities of a guerilla warfare? How are we prepared to resist this menace? The Japs may spread themselves in different parts of the province. What forces are there to combat such an aggression? Then again there is the question of maintenance of internal security. It is only with the help of disciplined forces, mainly consisting of the people of the land, which may not even be fully armed at the beginning, that we can hope to rouse the true spirit of courage and fearlessness in the minds of the people at large. My idea is that every district, sub-division and thana should have its own Home Army under the unified control of a Government department. This will not act as a watertight section but in full co-operation with the

civil authorities. It will be the people's army for saving their hearth and home from the impending attack of the enemy and from internal chaos.

I do not minimise civil defence activities. They are essential. But if you concentrate mainly on them, you automatically encourage the outlook of a defeatist. After all it is only passive resistance. The disposal of the dead and debris is of importance for saving the places which may be attacked. But civil defence and military defence must be fully co-ordinated and in both spheres they must represent the people's best efforts controlled by the representatives of the people themselves. We as Ministers are completely in the dark regarding the Military Policy in our part of the country. Immediate co-ordination between civil and military policy is essential and this must be done with the full co-operation of the people's representatives.

There will be many objections, as I have said before, from routine standpoint. But my appeal to you and through you to the Viceroy is that you must be bold enough to-day to discard red-tape and rusty bureaucratic notions of administration. As I have told you repeatedly, there are many Indians who do not like that British administration should be perpetuated in India. But there is no sensible well-wisher of India who desires that India should start on a fresh career of foreign subjugation under Japan. We have almost reached the end of our journey so



far as our relationship with England is concerned. What is required now is a broad statesmanship based on a full recognition of the fact that India must in future be controlled by Indians themselves. With tact and courage on both sides we shall remain as friends for all times to come. But you have to play the game and win back our confidence. Not a day should be lost in retracing the wrong steps taken in the past. I would ask you most earnestly, as one who desires that Bengal and India should be saved from foreign aggression, that you may come back from Delhi with a definite message that will rouse the spontaneous enthusiasm of the people of this province. You should on your return address the Legislature and announce that the provisions of the Army Act will be held in abeyance and Bengal will be given the right to raise a special Home Army of at least two lacs of people for the defence of Bengal. Other schemes for strengthening the Air Force and for providing an increased production of arms and ammunitions will also be taken in hand immediately. A Provincial Committee of National Defence consisting of representatives of civil and military authorities will be set up in Bengal. Old political differences will be kept in the background and the co-operation of all those who are in favour of fighting the enemy will be readily sought for. I have not the least doubt that such an announcement will be hailed with great earnestness throughout the province and we

shall usher in a new spirit that will face the enemy dauntlessly, no matter how strong and ruthless he may be. Along with this if the larger political settlement is also reached, Britain will not only make a new history in India during the period of war, but also will stabilise the cause of democracy and freedom throughout the world.

I do not know if the Commander-in-Chief proposes to visit Calcutta but I hope you will please show my letter both to him and to His Excellency the Viceroy.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

HIS EXCELLENCY SIR JOHN HERBERT, G.C.I.E.,  
*Governor of Bengal.*

## A WARNING VOICE

*(July 26, 1942)*

DEAR SIR JOHN,

I have been thinking over the questions which we discussed at some length at the last Cabinet Meeting, specially arising out of the threatened Congress movement. It is of utmost importance that there should be complete understanding between you as Governor and your colleagues during the present critical period. I am addressing this letter to you to-day entirely on my own behalf, but I propose to send copies of my letter to my other colleagues and specially show it to the Chief Minister after his arrival in Delhi.

You will recall that the present Cabinet consists of representatives of different groups in the Legislature which did not exactly see eye to eye with each other on many vital political questions. The parties however joined together under the leadership of the present Chief Minister and decided to give him their support in the formation of the new Cabinet on a general understanding that the new Ministry would work for the maintenance of communal harmony based on a policy of just administration affecting all communities and also lend its whole-hearted support for the purpose of winning

the war. We all felt that the salvation of India lay not in emphasising our mutual differences but in minimising them as far as possible during the present emergency and in concentrating on these vital issues which equally affected all communities, specially realising the need for the maintenance of internal security and the strengthening of war efforts in an effective manner. For carrying out this policy it was essential that even within the framework of the present Constitution, responsible Ministers must have wide powers to act for the good of the province, unhampered by interfering or obstructive activities of the Governor and the permanent officials concerned. We on our part have been able to demonstrate that Hindu and Moslem representatives can work together in a spirit of common understanding, in spite of grave provocations coming from within and without.

It is an open secret that the Hindu and Moslem combination in Bengal under Mr. Fazlul Huq's leadership was not welcomed by a section of permanent officials. It is not possible for me to say definitely how far this was due to a dislike of the present combination itself which included persons, specially amongst Hindus, who in the past expressed their opposition to many administrative acts. It might have been due also to an inordinate attachment which persons in high quarters have for the Muslim League, which has been definitely weakened by the

formation of the new Ministry by Mr. Fazlul Huq. We are often told that India's future political advancement was being retarded because of the failure of leaders of Hindus and Moslems to work together in the sphere of State Administration. For the first time in the history of British India, whatever democratic constitution has been handed over to us, in spite of its manifold defects, was sought to be worked in Bengal by Hindu and Moslem representatives who wielded considerable influence over their own community. The success of this experiment naturally would give a lie direct to the plea of communal disharmony standing in the way of India's political advancement. It would be therefore to the interest of diehard officials to see that this experiment proved a failure.

To speak frankly, your own attitude towards the Ministry has been far from satisfactory from the very beginning. I shall not recall here the hesitation that you had shown to call upon Mr. Fazlul Huq to form a new Cabinet after the last Ministry had resigned early in December. I shall not discuss how Calcutta and indeed the whole of Bengal were thick with rumours that Sir Nazimuddin, although he was in a minority, had received some sort of assurance from high quarters, that he and not Mr. Fazlul Huq would be asked to form the new Cabinet. Keeping these incidents in the background, let me record here my keen sense of disappointment, and surprise that

during the last seven months you should have constantly harped on the need for a settlement with the Muslim League at any cost. A division among the Hindus by reason of the Congress refusal to accept office did not worry you so much. The activities of some organisations mainly composed of Hindus, leading, according to the police reports, to weakening of Governmental authority, justified strong measures against them. But though the Muslim League for seven months carried on a relentless and vituperative campaign against the Ministry and specially the Chief Minister, thus weakening the forces of law and order and rousing communal passions, you all along characterised them either as constitutional agitation by the Opposition or mere attacks on Ministers individually which did not affect Government as such. Far from encouraging Mr. Fazlul Huq and his colleagues to go ahead with full speed you deemed it necessary to advocate the cause of the Muslim League in season and out of season. This special pleading for the League which in fact made us look upon you at times not as an impartial constitutional head of the province but as a loyal and distinguished whip of the Muslim League party itself, was indeed a mystery to all of us. You knew it perfectly well that we were not opposed to any party coming into the Ministry, and thus to form a complete National Cabinet but obviously that could not be done by sacrificing the honour and prestige of the

Chief Minister or breaking the unity of the Progressive Coalition Party. The contention of the Muslim League Party was that it could never come to the Cabinet so long as Mr. Fazlul Huq remained Chief Minister. My opposition to this proposal was not merely actuated by a sense of loyalty to my leader, but I honestly felt that this demand, if met, would virtually mean the up-rooting of the fundamental principle on which the present Progressive Coalition Party was based. Mr. Fazlul Huq was attempted to be made a victim of sordid personal animosity. During the last seven months he was branded by his ex-colleagues and ex-supporters as a traitor to Islam and a betrayer of the Moslem cause because he had joined with us, Hindus, in sharing the responsibility of office. We are now told that Sir Nazimuddin and his friends have no objection to work with us as representatives of the Hindu community, but Mr. Fazlul Huq must go. I have never been able to make you realise that there is no justification for this demand unless it was for holding up Mr. Fazlul Huq before the Moslem community as one who was made to suffer for his alleged lapses—although the same critics were prepared to do in July, 1942 exactly what Mr. Fazlul Huq had the foresight and courage to do in December, 1941.

While you had shown this inordinate anxiety to re-establish Muslim League in its position of supremacy, if necessary by sending away, as you used to

say, Mr. Fazlul Huq "in a blaze of glory", you showed no anxiety whatsoever to accede to our request for consolidating nationalist opinion, specially uniting the Hindu community. In various matters, such as release of political prisoners or a change in the policy of arrests and detention, or the Home Guard scheme as finally prepared by the Chief Minister, we had made proposals which, in our opinion, would have secured spontaneous co-operation from large sections of the people of Bengal, Hindus and Moslems, fully consistent with the security of the province, and they met with nothing but continued obstruction from you stage after stage.

The pity of it is that you have allowed yourself to be guided in vital matters concerning the rights and liberties of the people by the advice of one section of permanent officials and not by your constitutional advisers. Section 52 of the Government of India Act which clothes you with special responsibility, is capable of a very wide interpretation especially during the period of the War. You have allowed to function in this province a government within a government, where real power has been wielded by men who have very little responsibility in carrying on the constitutional Government of the province with the willing support of the people. This is a serious charge. But it is just as well that you should know that whether consciously or unconsciously, you have created this deep impression in the minds of



your Minister, which is hardly consistent with the real situation of the province.

With regard to Military questions, having occasional interviews and general discussions with some Military officers, the Minister as a whole has remained in the background. It is a fact that consultations have been held in Government House between you and Military officers, where even some prominent officers were present, but the Ministers were conspicuous by their absence. During this critical period there was ample room for co-operation in this sphere, but you have not encouraged it for reasons which I need not discuss.

Let me now refer to the situation that may be created in the province as a result of any widespread movement launched by the Congress. Anybody, who during the War, plans to stir up mass feelings, resulting in internal disturbances or insecurity, must be repressed by any Government that may function for the time being. But mere repression is no remedy when the promoters of the movement assert and make people believe that they too want to resist the impending attacks of the enemy, not as a slave country but as a free one; but the Ruling Authority is determined not to transfer real power to the children of the soil. As I had told you already, I genuinely believe that Japanese aggression must be resisted by us in our own interest. Japan does not intend to come to India to give us freedom. Indeed



or Germany as a menace to the cause of human liberty including that of India? Your call to the people of Bengal as the representative of the British Crown should be directed to every son and daughter of the province, irrespective of his or her present or past political activities. I feel definitely convinced that even at this late hour we can create a People's War Front which would include within its sphere everyone who is prepared to put up a stubborn fight against impending aggression of the enemy. There is no difficulty about those whose past political views do not create any doubt in your mind. But many of your permanent officers, and I believe you also, influenced as you are by their opinion, very often tremble at the thought of accepting the co-operation of patriotic Bengalees who, to put it even at its worst, were hitherto the enemies of British policy in India. Here you have to rise to the full height of your statesmanship if you can hope to discharge truly the great responsibility of your office. If I were to deal with them in my own way, I would immediately establish personal contact with all of them and offer them a willing hand of co-operation. I shall say that the ideal for which they fought so long has been achieved. It is recognised today by Britain and her representatives in India that so far as Britain and India go, India's right of independence is acknowledged. Therefore, there is no further quarrel between them and us as regards our past relationship.

As regards the present and the future, the main problem is to beat the enemy out of our country. If the enemy wins, then the freedom that is to come to us after the war will not be achieved.

If there is agreement on this fundamental point, I shall then sit down with them and without asking for any written undertaking from any of them, I would give them my help and co-operation in drawing out a comprehensive programme of work, *e.g.*, the place they will work in, the nature of their activities, how they will address people, what will be their relationship with the officials, etc. Each of these topics will be frankly discussed and an understanding reached. After they have regained their liberty, if reports reach us that they have betrayed the cause, and that they are acting in a manner which will be of help to the enemy, it will then be the duty and the responsibility of the Ministry to restrict their movements and to face the province boldly with the policy which the Ministry will then have to pursue. From my discussions with some of the important Police officials in Calcutta on Friday, especially from the viewpoint expressed by Mr. Ray of the Special Branch, I could see that they were still obsessed by the idea that these youngmen, in view of their past conduct, were not to be trusted at all. He referred to secret reports gathered by him regarding the activities of some of the affected people. But I

could see at once that the entire method of approach had been a wrong one.

Trust will beget trust. There have been occasions in history when parties fighting with each other had joined together for a common cause. What about Russia? Who could have dreamt that Russia and England would stand solidly together for beating a common enemy? Are representatives of the two countries today discussing their past differences or questioning each other's sincerity in relation to their past activities? That should also be the relative attitude between England and India to-day. We in Bengal cannot settle the tangle for the whole of India, but under your leadership we can start this experiment immediately in Bengal, and I feel sure of the tremendous response that we are bound to receive. If there are permanent officials who conscientiously feel that they are unable to carry forward this new policy, they should serve this country and theirs much better if they took their pension and went back to England. After all, it should not be forgotten that we stand very close to a devastating war which has already done havoc in several countries which were previously under British occupation. May I ask where are those high permanent British officials who were the trustees and guardians of the local inhabitants of those lands? Many of them have quietly or hurriedly left those countries but people belonging

to the land are still suffering misery at the hands of the enemy. Today you have no right to keep behind the prison-bars or under restriction any Bengalee who offers the hand of co-operation to serve his province at this time of national peril. The machinery to watch their movements will be there, and if after testing each case, it appears to responsible Ministers, and not to antiquated officials, that there are betrayers among the persons whom we want to trust, they will be dealt with severely by the Ministers themselves without hesitation.

The proposed Congress movement has to be examined from a new angle of vision on the present occasion. In the past a similar movement affected only the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Today, the movement will assume tremendous importance in view of the fact that the enemy is standing near the gate. The detailed programme of the movement has not been disclosed yet. The announcement made by the Working Committee that the British is being asked to withdraw, followed by further explanations that such withdrawal will not interfere with the British or Allied troops remaining in India and fighting the enemy, discloses considerable loose thinking. The British withdrawal. No constituted Government is determined by the British by agreement with Indians or otherwise "whom power will be handed over at the time" withdrawal. In each province and at the Centre

people sit round the table and form provisional Governments. The British troops continue to remain in power. And things go on merrily. If the Indian problem had been such an easy one, India would have attained freedom long ago. If the British withdraws today in implicit obedience to the demand of the Congress, neither the provinces nor the Centre can set up generally acceptable Governments but chaos and civil war will ensue almost immediately. The Hurs may take over charge of certain territories, and other organized elements may also take their chance. The British troops under Military command would also naturally like to take advantage of the situation and may establish military rule over the entire country. The whole scheme, unless it is further explained, is capable of such preposterous developments that people with ordinary intelligence are not likely to think much of it.

But it will be a colossal mistake to suppose that people would care to scrutinise the scheme in all its details or in a spirit of scientific detachment. The movement will at once stand as a symbol for India's attempt to attain self-government. And that is how the Congress is bound to appeal to the imagination and the patriotic impulse of Indians. The general issue before the country will be somewhat as follows: Here is a war which we want to support. But we would like to support it not as slaves but as free men.

The Allied powers say they want to crush the possible domination of the world by brute force, but when it comes to a question of giving real power to India, all sorts of obstacles are raised and India continues to be a dependent country. If that is the situation, and if England refuses to settle with India, it proves that this war, whatever may be the result, will not alter the fate of India. It is, therefore, necessary that India should in a non-violent spirit record her protest against the manner in which her just claims are being treated by the rulers, who pay lip sympathy to the cause of world freedom and progress.

Such will be the line of argument.

The question is how to combat this movement in Bengal? The administration of the province should be carried on in such a manner that in spite of the best efforts of the Congress, this movement will fail to take root in the province. It should be possible for us, specially responsible Ministers, to be able to tell the public that the freedom for which the Congress has started the movement, already belongs to the representatives of the people. In some spheres, it might be limited during the emergency. Indians have to trust the British not for the sake of Britain, not for any advantage that the British might gain, but for the maintenance of the defence and freedom of the province itself. You as Governor will function as the constitutional head



of the province and will be guided entirely on the advice of your Ministers. Permanent officials must be made to feel that Ministers will have both power and responsibility, and that they can never approach you over the head of the Ministers, or by way of appeal from their decisions. The policy to be pursued by the Ministers will be related, on the one hand, to the genuine economic and political rights of the people, and on the other hand, to the paramount needs of defence against the enemy's attack. Only by a transfer of power to Indians that you can hope to win the active and willing support of the people of Bengal.

We shall have to examine immediately the special spheres of activity and classes of people who may be liable to be influenced by a mass movement and see how far their just grievances can be properly adjusted. I would proceed somewhat in the following manner:—

1. *Middleclass Hindus*—They form the backbone of every political struggle. It is no use trying to crush their spirit or throw them into prison cells. If there are amongst them, or amongst any other class, people who have any contact, direct or indirect, with the enemy, they shall be dealt with severely by a responsible Minister after proper enquiry. The number of such leaders must be small. The bulk that follows them are often carried away by their patriotic zeal. They must at once be imbued

with the passionate idea that India's freedom is India's birth-right, and Japan which is coming to occupy India, must be resisted at any cost. They must be given proper occupation and scope for serving their country. I would immediately adopt a scheme of militarisation under proper military control. I have repeatedly asked you to obtain permission to raise at least one lakh of Bengalee soldiers for the defence of Bengal. You have raised three objections every time when I have approached you on this question, and to my mind none of these objections can stand a moment's scrutiny. You have said Bengal cannot have her own army. That may be the present regulation. That regulation is man's creation and man can undo it. If one way to settle our problem is to allow us to raise an army of our own under proper control and discipline, no one has a right to object to this proposal. Secondly, you have said there are no arms and amunitions. We are not going to tolerate this excuse for ever and for good. Arms and amunitions must be manufactured by us or imported into India from other countries. Every one may not be given arms immediately, but a beginning must be made with the least delay. Thirdly, you have said that there are no trainers. Trainers have to be brought from other parts of India or of the Empire, if necessary. All these objections must be surmounted and a failure to do so affords a legitimate ground for a

moment such as the Congress proposes to start. My country is in danger. I want my countrymen to take up arms for the defence of my motherland. I realise that this has to be done for the present with British co-operation. I welcome such co-operation, but why should there be delay in satisfying this legitimate desire of the people of this country? That the last Bengal Battalion failed is no answer. We shall now raise our army under different auspices altogether. Would you have liked your own country to be defended by people belonging to other countries and you be treated with a similar excuse by your rulers such as we are accustomed to hear from you? The real obstacle is distrust. Are you prepared to trust Indians and Bengalees with arms? There should be no difficulty on this point either, if you say that you have no desire to remain here after the war. When you withdraw, this army will be handed over to the new National Government that is to come in future as a result of the Indo-British settlement.

There is one point regarding the pay of Indian Sepoys and non-Indian soldiers and others in higher ranks. Why do you maintain discrimination of pay? I believe an Indian gets Rs. 16/- p.m. and a non-Indian soldier receives Rs. 90/- p.m. So also is the case in higher ranks. These are factors which breed discontent which no argument can answer. The Bengal army that will be formed should consist

of an equal number of Hindus and Moslems, subject to qualifications. I think if we commence recruitment within one week and give a call to the people properly, we shall not only get immediate response but also take away a considerable portion of the support that the Congress may hope to get out of its movement.

2. I have already explained how I would deal with those persons who are now detained or restricted for political activities.

3. I would re-examine the principles behind the denial policy. To my mind it has been a hasty and ill-thought of scheme which has greatly exasperated thousands of individuals belonging to both communities. Mere compensation in the shape of money does not meet the situation. Why should you follow the denial policy in the way in which it has been done? Just imagine for a moment what are its implications. It breathes an atmosphere of defeatism. We do not know when the Japanese propose to invade Bengal, but we take it that they will meet with a tremendous resistance here. That resistance will be mainly offered not by a policy of non-co-operation which is the basis of the denial scheme, but by a vigorous and aggressive offensive lodged by the Allied forces. Long before that happens, people are deprived of their boats, carriages, bicycles, etc. They are not only put to tremendous personal inconvenience, but there is

serious dislocation of trade and business. As I said the other day, unnecessarily we have deprived ten thousand persons in one district alone of their bicycles. Are they entertaining feelings of friendship towards us? A revision of the denial policy in consultation with the Military authorities is essential so as to minimise the widespread discontent that prevails in all parts of the province. Let registration and a scheme of effective control be completed which we can give effect to if emergency requires it.

4. The evacuation policy also needs considerable adjustment. There have been occasions when at Military request evacuation was ordered and then later on the Military authorities changed their minds. As you have yourself said a number of times, it should be possible for Government to draw up an elaborate scheme for resettlement of evacuees at Government expense, and this should be attended to immediately.

Government of India should also be asked to agree to the principle of payment of compensation to the evacuees when they will re-settle on their former lands and houses. There are bitter complaints against some local officers with regard to the method and manner of distribution of compensation. The remedy lies not in arresting the people who agitate but in removing the grievances themselves.

5. *Control of prices and supply of essential foodstuff and cloth*—This matter is assuming a serious turn and will afford a good ground for spreading Congress propaganda. The Government of India must realise that in the matter of transport-priorities, supply of foodstuff is of as much importance as that of commodities required for Military operations. Mere apointment of a few officers will not solve the problem. Price control, unless it is closely related to supply, will be worse than useless.

6. Along with price control we must take a long view of the possibility of increasing Bengal's production of essential commodities for her own consumption. The Agricultural and Industrial Department should make a special survey of this aspect of the problem before it becomes more acute.

7. *Labour Problem*—This is another sphere where attack may be launched. Just grievances of the labourers must be boldly and sympathetically looked into. We must establish personal contacts with all sections of labour leaders, and there must be an agreement as regards the general policy to be pursued by them. If that policy is not observed in practice by the labour leaders, we must not hesitate to take steps against them after due enquiry. But our first attempt should be to work out a scheme for mutual co-operation and goodwill.

8. Possible economic distress must be guarded against. One such problem relates to jute. It appears, roughly speaking, that even if the jute mills are allowed to produce goods and keep stock at their present rate, the agriculturists and the middlemen will have in hand nearly 15 to 20 lakhs of bales of jute on account of the worsening of export conditions. This might result in a serious economic depression affecting lakhs of poor agriculturists, who are to-day already burdened with distress on account of the denial policy and the evacuation schemes. We did not reduce jute production below eight annas per acre at the suggestion of the Government of India, and it is imperative that they should now take financial responsibility for purchasing the surplus jute and keeping it in stock for the next year. This matter has to be taken up with the Government of India as soon as possible.

9. In the past political movements mainly attracted the Hindus. On this occasion it is quite possible that in view of the discontent prevailing among the Moslem masses due to the denial policy, evacuation schemes and a possible jute crisis, the situation may further worsen and act as a stimulant to Moslem masses to join hands with any movement that throws the blame on the shoulders of Government.

10. Attitude towards the opponents of Government, particularly the Muslim League.

Once we succeed in defining our provincial policy on a broad and national basis as outlined above, we shall be in a better position to ask for the co-operation of all sections of the public. If that co-operation is not forthcoming, while we shall be ready to receive constructive suggestions from every quarter, we must not hesitate to fight any organization that merely intends to stir up communal or political passions. We may appoint a few special officers whose duty will be to receive information about local grievances, communal or otherwise, and Government will see that every such grievance is promptly dealt with. But during the war any attempt to spread discontent must be effectively resisted. We can do so, not by mere repression of individuals or organizations. That will not win public support in favour of Government. Our declared policy must be such as will convince the people that the fullest measure of Provincial Autonomy, subject to a well-co-ordinated Central Policy, relating to defence and other measures, is being actually enjoyed by responsible Ministers, and that both the Governor and the permanent officials are loyally respecting this new convention. That declaration of general policy must be followed by actual deeds which will show the people that their rights and liberties are being protected, and that their economic and other interests are not being subordinated to considerations opposed to the welfare of India or of Bengal.



Along with this, if there is an *ad hoc* machinery set up, as proposed, to enquire into and remedy grievances promptly and effectively, public confidence will be restored and spontaneous co-operation in respect of war efforts obtained. Subject to these steps being taken, we must suppress all attempts to spread communal or racial hatred or to rouse mass passions otherwise.

11. *Military Policy*—This is a sealed box to us and it places us in a most embarrassing situation. We do not wish to know details, for these are Military secrets. But we must be consulted on general questions of policy. One important viewpoint I desire you to convey to the proper quarters is, that we shall never win this war by merely trying to defend ourselves. There must be direct and bold attacks, based on a well-co-ordinated offensive policy, otherwise the enemy will never be beaten. It was indeed amazing that when enemy planes came to Bengal and bombed Chittagong, there was no attempt to chase them away from the frontiers of India. It was well-known that enemy planes were flying over large tracts of land in Eastern Bengal and Assam, but hardly any attack was launched on them. The effect of this policy is disastrous on public morale. After the fall of Singapore, Malaya and Burma, it is generally felt that there is no desire to put up a real and stubborn fight and Bengal may suffer the same fate as Burma had done. Public

morale will revive automatically only with some great Allied victories. In any case if the news of an air-raid by the enemy leading to loss of lives and property is immediately followed by a stirring report of our own counter-attack on the enemy planes, resulting in their losses, public confidence becomes immediately restored. The truth is, the present war cannot be fought to a finish by an army, however, well-paid and well-equipped, unless the army is imbued with a religious fervour so that it will rather face death than retreat or surrender an inch of the sacred land that it is called upon to defend. That feeling of sacredness is attached to one's own motherland and comes spontaneously, not from a hired or merely paid army, but from an army that consists of the children of the soil. The new strategy of glorious retreats has always the chance of over-shooting its mark. We rather prefer to hear more of Russian Suicide Squads that must stagger any enemy, however powerful. When they assemble on the fighting ground, the heroic soldiers of China and Russia feel every moment of their lives that they are standing on a free land that has belonged to them for generations past, hallowed by sacred memories; they spontaneously feel roused and determined to shed the last drop of their blood and to defy death, rather than to allow the enemy to win. It is for this reason that I ask you with all the emphasis at my command that you should take immediate steps for

raising a Bengalee army in land, sea and air and ask them to defend their own freedom.

I hope you will appreciate the spirit which has prompted me to write this letter to you. No one knows what the future has in store for us. As one of your Ministers, I am willing to offer you my whole-hearted co-operation and serve my province and country at this hour of crisis. The conditions which I have mentioned above are of a general character. They are mentioned not for creating any obstacle. They indicate to you, who are after all a foreigner, how an Indian would like to co-operate with you in the service of his country that is threatened with imminent danger. They indicate how the present constitution is a hindrance to the development of those vital forces without which the present war cannot be won. Their acceptance will not require any Parliamentary statute. What is needed is a broad statesmanship which should permit both the Viceroy and yourself to establish healthy conventions and to hand over complete power to the Bengal Ministry with you as the constitutional head to deal with the vital problems I have mentioned. In matters of defence the power will obviously be of a limited character. On the answer that you will give to this letter will not only depend the sincerity of the declarations that you and the Viceroy have made from time to time, but also the future welfare of my province. I shall only conclude by saying that what

I have asked for is nothing but power for the chosen representatives of the people to be shared with you during the War, a power which you can part with, only if you have genuinely made up your mind that this war is really a war of conflicting ideologies between brute force and domination on the one hand and human progress and liberty on the other, and that you stand solidly in favour of the latter.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

HIS EXCELLENCY SIR JOHN HERBERT, G.C.I.E.,  
*Governor of Bengal.*

## AN APPEAL TO THE VICEROY

*(August 12, 1942)*

DEAR LORD LINLITHGOW,

May I take the liberty of making an earnest appeal to you and through you to the British Government to reconsider the Indian political situation? No one genuinely interested in the welfare of India wants that the Axis Powers should win the war, for their victory is a peril to the cause of world freedom and specially to Indian liberty. For the sake of winning the war and for mobilising public opinion and the great resources of India, it is essential that India should have a free political status immediately. It is not enough for you to declare that India will attain freedom after the war. Immediate attainment of a free and equal status is not a mere expression of an abstract right but an essential condition for successful prosecution of the war itself. My experience as a Provincial Minister under the present Constitution convinces me that the present system of administration which places the final power of veto in the hands of the British representatives and which provides scope for interference with the legitimate activities of the Ministers can never serve the war-time requirements of the country. Gigantic preparations for Indian defence cannot be made

satisfactorily unless a National Government has the power to formulate and carry out a well-balanced policy for the purpose. The lessons of Burma should be an eye-opener to all right-thinking British statesmen. The British Power, which controlled the destinies of that country during the period of its struggle with Japan, collapsed and made its exit from the country when it found that it had to yield to the superior strength of the enemy. On the other hand, if Burma was a free country, acting with the fullest co-operation with Britain and other Allied Powers, the people and their representatives would not have beaten a retreat but fought with their life-blood for maintaining every inch of a country whose freedom it was their sacred duty to uphold at any cost. It is therefore essential that India's free status should be recognised immediately and the people of the country called upon to defend their own country in co-operation with the Allied Powers, and not merely look upon Britain to fight the impending aggression.

The demand of the Congress as embodied in its last resolution virtually constitutes the national demand of India as a whole. It is regrettable that a campaign of misrepresentation is now being carried on in some sections of the foreign press characterising the Congress demand as a virtual invitation to Japan and a surrender to chaos and confusion. No one desires that India should be plunged into a mass movement resulting in disorder and anarchy. At

the same time a refusal on the part of the British Government to deal with the real demand of the people in a spirit of true statesmanship will be an even greater disaster; for by this unwise decision it is they and not the Congress who will precipitate a crisis in India. Just as the Congress has a duty not to do anything suddenly which is bound to lead to chaos and disorder, so also have you a similar duty to ensure that there can be no just cause for discontent and disaffection, resulting in chaos and disorder. Repression is not the remedy at this critical hour. Indeed the history of all countries struggling for freedom amply discloses that the greater the repression from the ruling power, the more intense is the spirit of resistance of the people who regard themselves as oppressed and downtrodden. You may keep down by a severely repressive policy the external manifestations of discontent,—even that may become difficult to achieve without using extraordinary force, which again will have the most disastrous effects on the public mind of India. But even if you succeed, discontent is bound to be driven underground and anti-Government, especially anti-British feelings will stiffen throughout India. The enemy's object will be attained, for he cares not about Indian freedom but merely wants a chaotic condition in India. of which he will not fail to take the fullest advantage at the right hour. Indeed a blind pursuit of a repressive policy and a failure

to satisfy India's legitimate aspirations may well create an atmosphere in India which will make us look upon the enemy as a virtual liberator from the hands of the British oppressors,—a state of feeling with which many Indians hailed your ancestors under different surroundings in this very country about 200 years ago, when they gradually changed from their role of traders to that of masters of Indian affairs.

I therefore appeal to you to take a realistic view of the Indian situation, which must be examined in the light of rapidly-changing world-movements. There is none who is satisfied with the present system of Indian administration, and an immediate transfer of power is essential for the solution of the Indian deadlock. The substance of the Congress demand is nothing more than this. If there is a hidden motive to the contrary in the minds of the Congress leaders, which I for one am not prepared to believe, that motive will come out in its true colour as soon as your constructive proposals for the transfer of power are made known to the public of India.

What is regarded as the most unfortunate decision on the part of the British Government was its refusal to negotiate with Mahatma Gandhi, even after he gave his emphatic assurance that the movement would not start until all avenues for an honourable settlement had been explored. Indeed the movement has not been started by the Congress



but it is the British policy which has accelerated the crisis. This is an important aspect of the present situation which one cannot but deplore.

I would request you to apply your mind immediately to the problem of the solution of the present deadlock which is equally disastrous to India and Britain. May I make certain tentative proposals which may well form the basis of an honourable Indo-British settlement?

(1) The British Government should declare that India's freedom is formally recognised.

(2) The Viceroy or any one deputed by the British Cabinet will be authorised to negotiate with the Indian political parties regarding the formation of an Indian National Government to whom power will be transferred.

(3) The Indian National Government will declare its determination to fight the Axis Powers and it will not conclude a separate peace with the enemy.

(4) The war policy of India will be in accordance with the policy as determined by the Allied War Councils on which India will be represented.

(5) The Commander-in-Chief will remain in charge of the operational control of the war in India and will carry out the common policy of the Allied War Councils.

The Indian National Government will be able to raise an Indian Army whose aim will be to help in the maintenance of internal security and also to defend the country against foreign aggression.

(6) The National Government will be composite in character and will include representatives of important parties and groups in the country. It will set up provincial governments also on a similar basis.

(7) The membership of the Central and Provincial Cabinets will not be confined to Members of the Legislature but may include outsiders who may wield influence in the country and may be of special assistance during the period of the war.

(8) The Indian National Government will concentrate on an active policy of industrialisation and economic uplift of India so that India may effectively prosecute the war.

(9) The India Office will be abolished.

(10) As regards the future Constitution, the Indian National Government in due course will take necessary steps for the formation of a Constituent Assembly for the purpose. There will be a treaty between Great Britain and India which will specially deal with minority rights. In any case any minority will have the right to refer any proposal regarding the future constitution to the arbitration of an International Tribunal in case it considers such a

step to be necessary for the protection of its just rights. The decision of such Tribunal will be binding on the Indian Government and on the minority concerned.

You, as the representative of the British Crown, should be authorised to deal with the Indian problem with a definite mandate from the British Government. I have indicated above a brief outline of the fundamental points on the basis of which an Indo-British settlement is possible. Other proposals may also be made. But the principal factor is that the British Government must make up its mind to transfer power before negotiations can at all be started.

Let me briefly anticipate what may be the consequences of such an offer. You will release the Congress leaders and ask for a truce from every side. The offer will indeed be one of the finest gestures that any human race has made, occupying the position of rulers over a vast territory like India. But this is exactly in accordance with the ideal for which the Allied Powers have grouped together and have plunged the whole world into a veritable blood-bath. If the parties come to an agreement, the solution is immediately made and an awakened India bestirs herself with gigantic schemes of preparation for maintaining her freedom and also that of the Allied Powers. It is extremely doubtful if any party will venture to take up an obstructive attitude. You,

on your part, must be prepared to hand over power to those who are willing to accept it and shoulder responsibility. Once it is known that you have made up your mind to transfer power and you will not tolerate any particular party—however big and powerful—to obstruct, natural prudence and self-interest will dictate to each party the immediate necessity for coming to a settlement and accepting the offer. The non-co-operating party immediately loses its artificial power of veto. If it does obstruct and non-co-operate, it places itself automatically in the background when the Indian National Government takes up the reins of power and starts in its new career of service to the cause of Indian progress with the good-will of Great Britain and the Allied Powers. Indian opinion will not then hesitate to brand the activities of an obstructionist as inimical to the cause of India. If that party has then to be fought out of existence or suppressed by reason of its unlawful activities or pro-enemy tendencies, the responsibility for doing so will not rest with you or the British Government but with the Indian National Government itself. The condition precedent must of course be that such a Government is clothed with that freedom which is the birth-right of India, a freedom which, in consideration of the present crisis, has to be enjoyed by us in full collaboration with other nations pledged to the cause of progress, liberty and democracy.

Public opinion in India demands to-day that the British Government cannot sit idle and merely rule over India with British bayonets. If you are anxious to save India and the cause of the Allied Powers, you must make a gesture and no gesture will satisfy India to-day other than one that will mean a transfer of power to our hands for fighting for the freedom of our motherland. Please forget not that much as every Indian would like to feel that the enemy is bound to be routed, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the enemy may win, and then indeed begins a new career of slavery for the whole of India. If the worst comes to happen, the British will then withdraw from India and there will be a collapse of your administration. Even the Secretary of State with all his anxiety for the welfare of the teeming millions of India's population will not come to rescue us from Japanese bayonets which already rule over Burma to-day. On the other hand, you have declared that you will withdraw from this country after the war and acknowledge India's independence. We feel that for the very purpose of fulfilling your declaration and for winning a war, which is as much yours as it is ours, a recognition of India's free status is essential even during the war. But no sensible Indian would support a proposal that there should be a physical withdrawal of all Britishers from India during this critical period. We have to fight a common enemy

with all our joint resources. What we want is a broad-based adjustment between India and Britain during the interim period—an Indian National Government ruling over a free India, acting in a spirit of unity and co-operation with Britain and the Allied Powers, to contribute her humble share to the cause of preservation of world freedom. The Cripps Mission failed as it had practically nothing to offer us immediately and also for other reasons which I need not enter into. At best it gave us a post-dated cheque on a Bank whose future status was not wholly stable. Only a free India along with the Allied Powers can save India and the rest of the world.

I have intimated to the Governor of Bengal that I disapprove of the policy that has been launched by the British Government and their representatives at the present juncture. I am making this appeal to you in the hope that you will not allow false prestige to stand in the way, but take immediate action for solving the deadlock. In case however you feel that the British Government should not move further but allow the present impasse to continue, I must regretfully ask my Governor to relieve me of my duties as Minister, so that I may have full freedom to help to mobilise public opinion in demanding a settlement. I earnestly hope that both sides will cry a halt even at this last stage and all parties will do everything that is possible to arrive at a settlement which will

be honourable to all, and will help us to win the War that aims at crushing the finest fruits of human civilisation. May you, as the representative of the British Crown in India, rise equal to the occasion and contribute your worthy share in solving the deadlock.

As my letter represents the viewpoint of a large section of Indians, including many who have worked in co-operation with the British Authority in India, I request you to forward my letter to the British Prime Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps and the Secretary of State for India, so that, whatever the British Government may do, it may appreciate our attitude towards the present crisis.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

HIS EXCELLENCY LORD LINLITHGOW, P.C., K.T.,

G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E.

*Viceroy and Governor-General of India.*

## PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY —A COLOSSAL MOCKERY

*(November 16, 1942)*

DEAR SIR JOHN,

I have decided to resign from my office as Minister. My formal letter of resignation is being sent to you through the Chief Minister. A copy of my letter to him is enclosed. In this letter I propose to place on record the main events which have led me to take this step. When I accepted office nearly a year ago I was fully aware of the difficulties of the task I was undertaking. The province was then surcharged with communal tension almost unprecedented in its history. The war situation was also fast developing into serious proportions and the problem of strengthening the defence of the country was certainly one that required the combined co-operation of Government and the people. I have striven during the period of my office to maintain a healthy communal atmosphere, believing as I do that this province can never advance unless the two great communities comprised within it feel that its administration is being carried on in a fair and just manner. I have also maintained that in the interest of India herself our national war efforts must be strengthened and vitalised. I have not however always seen eye to eye with you in regard to the manner and method of mobilising public opinion in favour of the country's defence.



I shall not recapitulate all the matters I had discussed in my letters to you in March and July last and also in my letter to the Viceroy on 12th August last. They are to be read along with this letter in order to appreciate how I have tried over and again to persuade Government to change its présent barren policy but failed to produce any tangible results.

Broadly speaking, my reasons for resignation are two-fold. First, as I intimated to you at the earliest opportunity on 9th August last, I disapprove of the policy adopted by the British Government and the Government of India with regard to the présent political situation in the country. I am aware that you, as a Provincial Governor, have hardly any responsibility for the formulation of this policy. But my second reason mainly concerns you. And that is connected with the manner, in my opinion unwarranted, in which you have interfered with the work of the Ministry and have rendered so-called provincial autonomy into a meaningless farce. Although you could not be held responsible for any all-India decisions, you might have risen to the full height of statesmanship and by pursuing a bold and straightforward policy of trust and co-operation, changed the tone of the administration in Bengal, leading to a wholesome relaxation of the political situation and ensuring the safety of a province which is now one of the north-eastern war frontiers in India.

Let me refer briefly to the general political situation in the country. My letter to the Viceroy fully explains my view-point. But I should record here the extraordinary manner in which you acted when you received information of the policy as determined by the Government of India regarding the threatened Congress movement. When the letter from the Government of India came to the Chief Secretary, you showed it to and discussed it with the Chief Minister who rightly suggested that the policy enunciated by the Government of India on so important a subject should be fully discussed by Cabinet. You deliberately rejected this advice and even asked the Chief Minister to keep back the contents of the letter from his colleagues, although some permanent officials saw it and recorded their plans for giving effect to the directions. You decided that Cabinet would consider the letter only after information had been received from the Government of India that effect had actually been given to the policy formulated by it, following the arrest of the Congress leaders. Consultation at this stage was utterly useless as it gave no opportunity to Cabinet to record its views and communicate them for the effective consideration of the Government of India.

When on 9th August, after the arrest of the Congress leaders at Bombay, you ~~called us together~~ and asked us either to accept the policy or to resign

I pointed out to you that your action was extraordinary and brought provincial autonomy to a state of ridicule. You expected Ministers to stand by you on the basis of collective responsibility but declined to trust them and consult them on such a vital matter except at the very last moment when consultation was indeed fruitless. On that day I intimated to you that I disapproved of the policy of the Government of India as I felt strongly that every effort should be made by the British Government and its representatives in India to secure an honourable and peaceful solution of the Indian problem rather than that it should attempt to overawe the country by a ruthless policy of repression during the period of war. I did not resign at that time as I told you that I was going to write to the Viceroy on the subject. That letter was sent through you on 12th August and I received his reply early in September after my return from Delhi. I believe my letter has been forwarded to the British Government but it is clear that there is no desire whatsoever on the part of Government to bring the present impasse to an end. I had not in the meantime sat idle but had humbly attempted to organise public opinion in favour of an immediate settlement. Large sections of representative opinion in the country did openly approve of the steps that I along with others had taken. I got into touch with all the important political parties except the

Congress and when I asked for permission to interview Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders, my request was rejected by the Viceroy.

I have all along felt that the principal responsibility for settling the present deadlock must rest with Government. The deadlock will not be solved until and unless Government makes up its mind to transfer power to Indians. Immediate establishment of composite National Government at the centre and in the provinces, enjoying real power and pursuing an all-out Defence policy, co-ordinated with the general war policy of the Allied Powers, is essential as much for India's welfare as for that of the Allied Powers themselves. We want to regard ourselves just as free to mould our destinies as Englishmen would like to feel in the land of their birth. Lack of Indian unity is a false plea put forward by British spokesmen. No political advance in the past was made conditional upon complete unity within India. If British Government decides to transfer real power and not play the old game of 'divide and rule', the parties must unite in their own interests. Those who do not unite, in spite of real transfer of power, will automatically fall in the back-ground. The fact is that the British Government wishes to hold India under its sway at any cost. The demand of India is simple and straightforward. A slave cannot fight wholeheartedly for any noble cause. India wants that

she should be a free country and she should fight along with other free nations for the liberation of humanity against the onslaught of Axis Powers. You have enjoyed freedom in your own country for too long a period to realise fully what it means to be a subject-race that feels oppressed and down-trodden. The tragedy of it all is that at this critical hour when large territories under British Rule in the East have been snatched out of its control mainly on account of its failure to fill the minds of their native people with a burning zeal for maintaining their integrity,—one must have freedom before one can die for it—it should even now persist in following the same mistaken policy with regard to the Indian people.

If it is a crime to aspire to see one's country free and shake off foreign domination, including British, every self-respecting Indian is a criminal. There are administrators in India who dream constantly of fifth columnists walking on the roads and lanes of Indian towns and villages. These estimable gentlemen themselves belong to this category, if treachery to India's genuine interests is the real criterion of a fifth columnist in India. The great bulk of the Indian people can have possibly no sympathy with Japan or with any other Axis Power. Why should we Indians be at all anxious to invite Japan to this country? We want you to return to your own home safely and as speedily as possible, and does it stand to reason that we would welcome

a new master with fresh vigour and unsatisfied lust for widespread possession? We want to be rid of alien rule altogether. We want this country to belong to and to be governed by ourselves. India has for a long time allowed herself to be sacrificed at the altar of Imperial greed. The doctrine of benevolent trusteeship stands exploded and you can no more throw dust into our eyes. Indian representatives therefore demand that the policy of administration of their country in all spheres, political, economic and cultural, must be determined by Indians themselves, unfettered by irritating acts of unsympathetic bureaucrats and bungling Governors. There was however ample room for mutual help and trust between England and India for, after all, it is a common menace that threatens both to-day. We recognise that the war must for the present absorb our whole attention, but only with a free and willing partnership between India on the one hand, and England and other Allied Nations on the other, could we have fittingly organised ourselves for keeping the enemy out of our own country and saving the cause of the Allied Nations themselves. The British Government has failed to realise that India cannot be roused to a passionate fervour and devoted activity, such as witnessed in Russia and China, unless Indians feel that they are free men and their freedom is to be saved, no matter at what sacrifice.

These are natural sentiments fully consistent with the declared war-aims of the Allied Nations. If you are sincere in your assertion that you are anxious for a new world-order and want to see that the cause of human freedom is never again imperilled, why should you hesitate to do a little act of self-abnegation by acknowledging India's freedom and thus save yourselves from being branded as guilty of hypocrisy? Instead of doing what is just and natural, for three months Government has carried on a reign of repression, which will serve as a good model to those deeply attached to totalitarian rules of conduct and whose alleged misdeeds are widely circulated through British agencies. During these months people have lost their fear of bullets. What can possibly be your next sanction to hold India in chains? To-day India seethes with discontent and bitterness. It is the easiest thing in the world to fight with a people that are unarmed and defenceless. Some of the British spokesmen have said that India or a section of the country has declared war. If that is their belief, then let arms be provided to Indians and let the fight take place on a basis of equality. The most dangerous symptom to-day is that people feel so completely frustrated at the turn that events have taken that they would welcome any change to get rid of the present tyranny.

It is indeed regrettable that men responsible for Indian administration should have forgotten the simple truth that Britain cannot fight India and the Axis Powers together. On account of sheer bankruptcy of statesmanship, much good-will and co-operation on the part of Indians have been allowed to flow in the channel of distrust and resentment. Many of the administrators have lost their equilibrium and cannot hide their animosity towards Indians as a class. I am not suggesting that many of the senseless acts of outrage and sabotage committed during the last three months will help us to obtain our country's freedom. Let lawlessness be checked. But that is not the only problem. Violence and counter-violence have moved in a vicious circle and vitiated the atmosphere of the country today. You have failed to go to the root cause of the Indian unrest. It is the hunger of liberty that is to be satisfied, if peace is to reign in India again. Mere suppression of external manifestations of disorder by force, or worse still, a deliberate policy of terrorism, without any attempt to move along constructive lines to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of India only widens the gulf of difference between Britain and India and is hardly of any good to either country or to the cause of world-freedom. India cannot be held against her will merely on the point of bayonet. Notes of warning are being sounded by well-meaning Britishers in their own country and here; and also



by influential sections of public opinion in America and China. But a false sense of power, prestige and possession chokes the voice of reason and justice.

I wish I could have closed my letter at this point and had not to refer to your own administration which has also contributed in no small measure to the worsening of the situation. In my letter to you written in July last I had given an idea of my feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment at the manner in which I had seen you administer the affairs of this province. With much apparent goodwill you have bungled stage after stage. For the first time since the Reforms of 1919 Bengal had a ministry enjoying the support of large sections of Hindus and Moslems. Parties and persons who were violently opposed to each other on political and communal considerations had agreed to stand on a common platform for the good of the people specially during the period of war. There are certain people occupying high positions in this country and also abroad, who for obvious reasons do not like a strong combination of Hindu and Moslem elements. The co-operation offered by us was not responded to by you and a certain section of the permanent officials. I regret to say that from the very beginning of our association with you, you have failed to rise to that impartial height of a provincial Governor which could have given you courage and foresight to respect the Constitution, establish new conventions and

broaden the base of the provincial administration so as to win the affection and confidence of the people. You have all along permitted yourself to be guided by a section of permanent officials,—loyal die-hards, according to you; short-sighted and reactionary, according to us; resulting in the establishment of a government within a government which has proved disastrous to the interests of the province.

I shall not go into details. But let me remind you that you showed no sympathy whenever proposals for the recognition of the people's rights in various fields of activity were made. They were turned down by you because of deep-rooted distrust and suspicion. Our proposal for raising a Bengal Army was not acceptable to you for reasons which would not even bear scrutiny. This alone would have revolutionised public opinion in Bengal. The scheme for popularising the Home Guard was rejected by you in spite of unanimous advice of all the Ministers, simply because you and your officials were afraid of trusting the people. You have systematically resisted the appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries and the expansion of Cabinet, just to embarrass the Ministry. Even before the Congress started any movement, you declined to give back to thousands of Bengalees their freedom which had been denied to them on suspicion or for participation in political movements, although we were prepared to take full responsibility for their future

behaviour and activities consistent with the war-situation. Recommendations for individual releases or even for temporary relaxation were turned down by you, utterly oblivious of any assurance given by us. In matters relating to the denial policy you failed to realise the untold suffering into which thousands of people would be thrown and the discontent that was bound to follow; and only after a good deal of efforts could that policy be only slightly modified. We do not yet know what plans have been kept ready for destruction of plants, machinery and other properties in case of enemy invasion. Even in matters relating to supply of food and control of supplies you have interfered with ministerial action and have rendered our task extremely embarrassing. You have discouraged the growth of collective responsibility among Ministers while taking momentous decisions on vital issues. Ministerial advice has been brushed aside in regard to selection and posting of officers, while your unabashed softness for the present Opposition Party is in marked contrast to the treatment we used to receive in a similar capacity when the last Ministry was in office. Even with regard to a simple question like prorogation of the last session of the Assembly, you have declined to accept our advice. Indeed I did not even receive a reply from you to my letter written early in October, pointing out how the Province had to incur wasteful and avoidable expenditure due to your decision not to

prorogue the Assembly, simply to harass the ministry. In matters affecting the rights and liberties of the people you have constituted yourself into an appellate authority and you claim to act in exercise of your special powers under the Government of India Act. I have repeatedly told you that this is an absurd situation. During the war you can function with success only if you regard yourself as primarily responsible to the people of this province and act on the advice of their chosen representatives. But you have regarded yourself as one who is beyond anybody's control, enjoying powers without being required to give account to any other authority. You have expressed your annoyance from time to time, that Ministers are not more active in rousing public opinion in respect of matters relating to war or the general political situation. You will not allow Ministers to function and administer according to their own light and judgment. You and some of your officers will commit Government to policies and acts which Ministers do not approve of and afterwards you expect them to stand up as obedient persons fully justifying the results of your mistaken policy. The brunt of the attack falls on Ministers. The Legislature is even precluded from criticising or commenting on your conduct. You in your turn do not hesitate to take advantage of, and sometimes even go beyond the spirit of the provisions of the Government of India Act and the Instructions to

Instructions, thus reducing ministerial administration to a mockery.

But the most difficult situation has been created with regard to the manner of suppression of the political movement. I have told you repeatedly that while it is the duty of any Government to see that acts of lawlessness are not committed or that disturbances are not created specially during this grave emergency, Government must not in any manner provoke a crisis or encourage or make it possible for officers to commit excesses or to inflict injury on innocent people. Where persons deliberately commit offences, they must face the consequences of the law. But in spite of our best efforts, indiscriminate arrests have been made, innocent persons assaulted and shot down and oppression has been carried on in some parts in a manner hardly creditable to any civilized Government. The fact that some British prisoners of War under German control were put under fetters roused the loud and angry protests of the British Government and its supporters. Can you not express even a fraction of that moral indignation for similar and even worse outrages committed on Indians by the agents of the British Government itself? You have persistently refused to have allegations enquired into and have also helped in the suppression of publication of accurate news.

The political movement took a grave turn in some parts of Midnapore and none can say anything in respect of any legitimate measures taken to deal with persons guilty of serious offences against the law. But in Midnapore repression has been carried on in a manner which resembles the activities of Germans in occupied territories as advertised by British agencies. Hundreds of houses have been burnt down by the police and the armed forces. Reports of outrages on women have reached us. Moslems have been instigated to loot and plunder Hindu houses; or the protectors of law and order have themselves carried on similar operations. Orders were issued from Calcutta that it was not the policy of Government that houses should be burnt by persons in charge of law and order. I have ample evidence to show this order was not carried into effect and even after the unprecedented havoc caused by the cyclone on the 16th October and our visit to the affected areas a fortnight later, the burning of houses and looting were continued in some parts of the district. Apart from the manner in which people were fired at and killed, these acts of outrage committed by Government agencies are abominable in character. Let us condemn by all means acts of lawlessness perpetrated by volunteers. To my knowledge they did not take the life of any Government servant. In any case the wrongs perpetrated by breakers of

law and order are no justification whatsoever for the upholders of law and order to terrorise innocent people and to oppress one and all in a ruthless manner.

The reports which I have received about the callousness and indifference of some of the officers even after the cyclone perhaps find no parallel in the annals of civilized administration. The suppression of news of the havoc by Government, and even of appeals for help, for more than a fortnight was criminal. In the presence of the District Magistrate complaints were received that boats were not made available on that fateful evening or even later to save the lives of the people who were perilously resting for a brief while on the roofs of their houses that ultimately collapsed. One gentleman gave a harrowing description of the manner in which he and others begged of officers to allow a boat found by them to ply for a couple of hours in order to rescue some men, women and children lying near the area concerned. This request was summarily rejected and the men who had used the boat were threatened with dire consequences. Later on, all the people whom this party wanted to rescue were washed away, never to be found again. After the cyclone curfew orders are continuing even in areas where people offered every co-operation. Our intervention in this respect proved fruitless. Transport facilities and movements were extremely restricted even when we visited the

district a fortnight later. Cows were requisitioned under the Defence of India Rules. The total destruction of cattle owing to flood and storm would be somewhere between 75 and 85 per cent. Of the cows that remained, although they were giving milk and some were with calf, a good many were snatched away from private houses by the police and the military for the purpose of feeding the troops. Such inhuman callousness is indeed unparalleled. One officer's report in writing to Government was that relief, whether organised by Government or any private agency, should be withheld for a month and thereby people taught a permanent lesson. Relief measures adopted by local officers were utterly inadequate. Even bonafide private relief workers from Calcutta, though they produced their credentials, found themselves in Jail under the Defence of India Rules. There is no chance on our part to get these officers removed from that area because prestige will then suffer. There is no chance of any enquiry being held, although other provincial governments have held enquiries, under far less serious circumstances, for then again prestige will suffer. The only chance that people of this province apparently have is to suffer patiently at the hands of the upholders of law and order and wait for the day when nemesis is bound to come.

We have been told that there are indications that political agitation is still in progress in some



parts of Midnapore. There may have been sporadic outbursts but from my personal knowledge I can definitely assert that the bulk of the people, including supporters of the Congress, genuinely want peace to be restored immediately. From my talks with many inside and out-side the Midnapore Jail I am satisfied that if officers dealt with the situation with tact and sympathy, subversive activities would completely stop and the whole of Midnapore would rise to a man to work whole-heartedly with Government for giving relief. It is disgusting how valuable time has been wasted for one month because of the apathetic and dilatory attitude of some of the local officers on the one hand, and the strange obstructiveness of some of the representatives of the department of law and order in Calcutta, on the other. Meanwhile thousands are suffering for want of food, shelter, medicine, clothings and drinking water. The present methods of persecution and slow action are both cruel and fatal and they will not die out nor the atmosphere improve until some officers are transferred from the district. Ministers feel that both for the correct maintenance of law and order and for the sake of suffering humanity this should be done immediately, but they are powerless to give effect to it. You too declined to accept our advice in this respect. Could you not as Governor issue in time a public message of sympathy,—the Viceroy could do it—for the unprecedented loss

following the flood and cyclone, costing the lives of at least thirty thousand people and colossal destruction of cattle and property, a havoc which British troops describe as similar to the worst ravages that may be caused by enemy bombing? Let an impartial enquiry be conducted into the affairs of Midnapore and the correct version on both sides see the light of the day. Will you have the courage to agree to this?

The manner in which collective fines have been imposed by Government throughout the province deserves severe condemnation. The scheme of imposition of collective fines on Hindus alone, irrespective of their guilt, has been an all-India feature and is a British revival of the ancient policy of Jijia for which Aurangzeb made himself famous. In Bengal the Chief Minister had been averse to the imposition of such fines and tried again and again to lay down certain principles which were unimpeachable from the point of view of elementary justice. You have interfered with the Chief Minister's decision and have prevented him from giving effect to these directions. Amounts have been imposed in many cases without any regard to the total damage caused or to the part played by the inhabitants concerned. In at least one case I know the collector was not even consulted; in some others local officers were invited by Government itself to propose the imposition of fines. I have carefully examined the papers with regard to a number of these cases and the

monstrosity of the imposition has staggered me. I challenge you to place the materials on which decisions have been taken before any impartial judge and I have not the least doubt that in most cases the verdict will be that the fines are not at all leviable in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance, or that the discrimination made is completely unjustifiable or that the amounts fixed are entirely disproportionate in character. Fines have been imposed in many cases without the Chief Minister knowing what was being done. Only recently it was suggested by the Chief Minister that the realisation might be delayed by a fortnight and the entire policy considered at a Cabinet meeting. Your answer to this request, which was made on behalf of us all, was in full conformity with the traditions which you had already established. You had no objection to Cabinet meeting being held. But you indicated beforehand with sufficient clearness, but with unbecoming impropriety and discourtesy to ministers, that you would in any case pass orders in exercise of your individual judgment for the immediate collection of the fines.

It is amazing how in every matter concerning the rights and liberties of the people or where racial considerations were likely to arise, you have acted with singular indifference to the genuine interests of the people of this province. A difficult and tense situation, such as the present, might have been eased

by a policy of administration actuated by sympathy, understanding and good-will. Irresponsible possession of powers by persons without a high degree of administrative ability, ignorant of Indian mind and conditions and blindly guided by unsympathetic bureaucrats, leads to disastrous consequences during the period of war. If ever a time comes when an impartial stock is taken of what you and others did and omitted to do, the verdict will be that at a critical hour you hopelessly failed to serve a province of great strategic importance, although, if correctly approached, its people were capable of being roused to an intense patriotic fervour and would have readily agreed to face any sacrifice and suffering for saving their own country from the impending invasion of the enemy. What you and others have done has only helped the enemy who cares not for our future. Whatever happens, it is we, the people of the land, who will suffer as much at the hands of our so-called protectors as of the avowed destroyers. Military matters are kept dead secret from us. We still hope Bengal and India will be successfully defended. But if the worst happens, you and others, who now feel overpowered by special responsibilities will, like your friends similarly situated in Burma, desert the province, we remaining here, unarmed, unprepared and emasculated, to face your parting bullets and the yet unknown operations of the denial policy on the one hand; and the oppression of the invading enemy,

on the other. And yet with good-will and statesmanship on your side to which the great bulk of Indians would have warmly responded, what a bulwark a Free India and the Allied Nations would jointly have been against the combined forces of the Axis Powers.

I am sorry that our official association should end like this at this critical hour in the history of my province, I honestly feel I can be of no use to my countrymen or to you by remaining in office so long as the general all-India policy remains what it is and the province is administered by you on lines which I consider inimical to its best interest.

I shall release this letter as also the previous letters I wrote to you in March and July last as soon as my resignation is accepted. May I publish your reply to my July letter? I also propose to publish simultaneously my letter to the Viceroy sent on 12th August. Will you please ascertain if I may publish his reply to my letter? All these letters deal with matters of far-reaching importance to the public in India and abroad, specially at this critical juncture in the history of our country.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee

His Excellency Sir John Herbert, G.C.I.E.,  
*Governor of Bengal.*

## THE RESIGNATION .

*(November 16, 1942)*

My dear Chief Minister,

I have addressed a long letter to the Governor today, copy of which I enclose. This will explain to you the circumstances, beyond your control and mine, which compel me to resign.

A formal letter of resignation addressed to the Governor is sent herewith. Please forward it to him.

Whatever may happen in future, I hope you and I will be able to work together for the protection of popular rights and for maintaining a healthy communal atmosphere in the province.

I am indeed grateful to you for all the confidence you have shown me during the last one year.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee

The Hon. Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq,  
*Chief Minister of Bengal.*

*16th November, 1942.*

DEAR SIR JOHN,

I hereby resign from my office as a Minister.

I have addressed another letter to you to-day explaining in detail the circumstances which compel me to take this step. This letter is being sent to you through the Chief Minister.

Yours sincerely,  
Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

His Excellency Sir John Herbert. G.C.I.E.,  
*Governor of Bengal.*

## APPENDIX A.

### THE HOLLOWNESS OF THE CRIPPS OFFER

The debate in the House of Commons on the failure of the Cripps mission clearly indicated that the Indian point of view had not been correctly appreciated. People who are not fully conversant with facts may well form the conclusion that the Indian political parties had deliberately thrown away an offer of great value made by the British Government leading towards Indian freedom. The Working Committee of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was the first to have expressed its view-point on the Cripps scheme. It found in the scheme much that was clearly good and much that was positively bad for India. Since Sir Stafford Cripps made it abundantly plain that India had either to take the main features of the scheme as it stood, or to leave it, we had no option but to reject the scheme.

Let me first deal with the right of a provincial unit to secede from the Indian federation. This is popularly known as the Pakistan demand of the Moslem League to which the British Government has virtually surrendered. The proposal contains the seeds of disruption of India which would germinate at the will of only a section of the Indian people. They openly disavow their loyalty to the



spirit of India as such and base their allegiance to an idea of separate federation which might well be allied to other independent states, governed by people following one particular religious faith. India is one and has been one country from time immemorial, although inhabited by millions of people of varied religions, castes and creeds. This fundamental unity of India has been the growth of centuries of efforts of Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists and, during the last two centuries, of Britishers themselves. Indeed the principal achievement of Britain in India during her 200 years of rule has been the strengthening of an Indian political entity which the British statesmen of 1942 desire to break with their own hands. The problem is not really how to knit together various provincial units, now separated from each other, into the frame-work of an Indian federation or "*a new Indian Union*", as stated by Sir Stafford Cripps; but how to retain and further deepen the cultural and political entity of India and by judicious unloosening of rigid control at the centre, to confer larger powers upon autonomous provincial units. Any proposal that may lead to the breaking of India into several independent fragments or into two or more independent federations, each maintaining its own army, its railway, its currency, with power to negotiate with any foreign country, with no strong and cohesive central Government will sound the death-knell of Indian unity and

freedom. Strange, indeed, that such a proposal could even bear a moment's examination at a time when the tragic lessons of dividing Central Europe into small states are so clearly linked up with the terrible war that is devastating human civilization to-day. India will then become a veritable chess-board on which not only Indian provinces (constituted mainly on a religious basis) may fight with each other but interested foreign nations may find ample scope for fateful intrigues and dissensions. One may say that I am drawing up a picture that is unnecessarily gloomy and menacing. My answer is that India did pass through such stages in course of her chequered history and why should the British Government, while departing from this country, formulate a scheme which, instead of unifying diverse elements, may well throw the country into a chaotic condition?

And one asks what is the impelling reason for such a dangerous and hazardous proposal? The answer which we receive is that Moslem opinion will not otherwise be satisfied. It seems indeed amazing that the same British Government which has resolutely withstood the insistent demand of Indian self-government for more than 35 years should now feel compelled to succumb to a fantastic claim, which is not even three years old, for the vivisection of India, made by one section of a community, although the same may be injurious to the interest of India

as a whole. Be it noted here that there are large sections of Moslems themselves who do not favour this proposal but they, strangely enough, receive no encouragement from British leaders. It is the group of separationists who are encouraged by British policy to spread far and wide their appeal to Pan-Islamic fanaticism. And this support has now culminated in an open blessing of the scheme by the British Government itself. If the British wants that Indians should not have internal peace and should live in perpetual bitterness and strife, it could not have done anything better.

Many friends without studying the problem ask—but surely, have not 90 millions of Moslems the right of self-determination? Let me answer this question fully. The right of secession is not being granted to Moslems as such residing in self-contained zones but to a provincial unit. The present provincial boundaries, although they were not adjusted on any linguistic, cultural, communal or sociological basis, will continue to be the guiding factor at the time of cessation. Every such province will include Hindus, Moslems, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Anglo-Indians and others. Take Bengal, with a population of about 60 millions of people of which about 52 per cent. are Moslems and 44 per cent. are Hindus. What is this code of self-determination that entitles 52 per cent. of Moslems to decide the fate of 44 per cent. of Hindus and take the province out of

the Indian federation? When the British spokesmen talk of self-determination, what right have they to confine it to provincial units alone, particularly when each such provincial unit contains large sections of people belonging to diverse faiths and creeds? There apparently the majority will not be "tyrannical" and can easily be trusted to decide the fate of large or small minorities residing within the area. The great responsibility of the British Government for the safety of the minorities is not at all adversely affected in such cases. Why, one asks, should not then the same principle of self-determination apply in respect of India as a whole, and why should not the people of India have the right to determine for themselves whether they want their own country to be vivisected or not?

Therefore, if the object is to confer a right on the Moslem to decide what they want for themselves, it is clear that object cannot be achieved without surrendering the rights of peoples of other faiths and communities residing in the same zone. Again, if the object of vivisection is to settle the communal problem, let me say at once that that object will not also be achieved at all. For, as I have said already, Hindus and Moslems will still continue to live within the same zone. Neither party will then be actuated by any common ideal of Indian nationhood. The existing differences will reappear in a more aggressive form as the zones will then openly express

their loyalty to states based on the religion of the majority community.

We are often told that Hindus residing in the provinces where Moslems are in a majority will not be maltreated because of the consequent possibility of Moslems being similarly dealt with in provinces where Hindus will be in a majority. Is this a safe and sane outlook as regards India's future existence? Communal harmony and peace will then develop not by placing religion out of politics, not by developing a common ideal of nationhood, but by keeping alive a perpetual spirit of retaliation if occasion arises, and also as a logical conclusion thereof, by keeping the door open for a civil war between two provinces or two federations. That members of a particular community should be treated as hostages within an area is a most dangerous proposition which should not be countenanced by any Britisher or Indian who is interested in the welfare of the Indian people.

One may look at the problem from any direction one likes. And the answer is irresistible that the very idea of a possible vivisection of India is repugnant to the safety of India as a whole and to the welfare of Hindus and Moslems alike. People who advocate this scheme, be they Indians or foreigners, are consciously or unconsciously the enemies of Indian progress. To us, this is a fundamental issue. It is an issue which admits of no compromise and has to

be fought to the bitterest end, irrespective of all consequences.

One may ask what then should be the proper solution of the minority problem in India? When we negotiate with the British Government we naturally think in terms of a settlement which will be peaceful by nature and will be capable of being translated in due course into a statute to be enacted by the British Parliament. We are not discussing here the possibility of India winning her political freedom by means of an open resistance to Britain, nor are we considering the question of solving the Hindu-Moslem problem by means of a civil war. The basis of the Cripps scheme is that a settlement honourable to India and to all parties may be reached in India which will be accepted by the British Government. The scheme contemplates a treaty between Britain and the Constituent Assembly involving the rights of the minorities. That proposal has been accepted by all the parties. It will, therefore, afford sufficient guarantee to all minorities to have their rights of citizenship protected in the future constitution of India. I take it that the Constitution Act itself will embody the terms of this treaty which will be binding on the Indian Federation and the Provincial Units. In future if any point arises suggesting a violation of any of the provisions of the treaty, the party concerned will no doubt have a proper remedy in accordance with the

constitution itself. Let us now proceed to the next stage. The Constituent Assembly meets and frames a constitution for India. It is said that the Assembly will include a majority of Hindus, and they may frame a constitution which may prove repugnant to certain important elements in the national life of India. Let us not forget that the treaty will be there to protect minority rights, and the draft constitution must be in conformity with the provision of the treaty. Normally there should not, therefore, arise at this stage any serious case of violation of minority rights. But supposing for the sake of argument that the draft constitution does find serious opposition from certain elements with the minority communities, how should such differences be solved? Now our point is that no party or community will have the right to question the supreme and fundamental unity of India. That will not be, therefore, a question of dispute between the Constituent Assembly and any minority community. A minority community may object to certain features of the draft constitution on specific grounds. For instance, there may be the question of joint and separate electorates, or of reservation of seats, or of reservation of services, or of weightage in the Legislature or of educational facilities or right of religious observances, and so on. On these points the decisions of the Constituent Assembly will be there. The reasons for their non-acceptance by any minority

community should also be clearly expressed, and the points of difference, after they have been tabulated, should stand referred to an International Tribunal to be composed by the Constituent Assembly in consultation with the dissenting party whose nominee will be included in the Tribunal itself. Whatever decision that Tribunal will make will be binding on the Constituent Assembly and the dissenting party and the draft constitution will stand accordingly amended. The British Government, therefore, will receive from the Constituent Assembly a draft constitution either based on agreement in its entirety, or based on the decision of the Constituent Assembly as amended by the International Tribunal.

What more guarantee is it possible for Hindus or for Indians as a whole to give to Moslems or to the British Government regarding the *bona fide* of their intention? We are prepared to treat the minority problem in the same manner as it has been treated under the conventions of the League of Nations. Only on one point we are absolutely uncompromising, and that is we shall not allow India to be vivisected. Those Britishers who ask us to accept this proposal for the sake of peace should remember that there are certain matters in life which do not admit of a compromise. Why is it that Britain herself refuses to compromise with Hitler? The latter belongs to Europe and I believe still adheres to the Christian faith. If Hitler could be pacified by



British surrender or by world-surrender for the matter of that, will Britain or the rest of the world now fighting Hitler agree to do so merely for the sake of compromise? Britain and the other Allied Forces are fighting for a great cause, for an ideal of life which justifies any sacrifice. The same exactly is the position with us who feel with all the genuineness that we can command that we can never allow the integrity and unity of our motherland to be broken for the sake of placating a section of Indian people who are little concerned with the peace and progress of India as a whole.

I have dealt with the right of cessation at some length, because there are many people who do not genuinely appreciate our viewpoint. I sincerely hope that all fair-minded critics will appreciate how dangerous this portion of the Cripps scheme is, and they will do everything that is possible to see that the British Government withdraws its concurrence from this commitment.

As regards interim arrangements, I regret to say that they have been delightfully vague and indefinite. The real question is that representatives of Indian people must have power transferred to them during interim period. The Government of India Act of 1935, both in respect of the provincial sphere and of the centre, (the latter being still controlled by the 1919 Act) is totally unsuited to

present conditions. To win the war people must feel that the country is theirs, the Government is theirs and their Government is fighting the battle of freedom. It is amazing that Sir Stafford Cripps should have failed to have given a clear assurance that the proposed National Government at the Centre during the interim period would have real power to administer the affairs of the country. At present the Viceroy has an expanded Council. But it is an open secret that there is no collective responsibility, and the Indian members have little voice in shaping the policy of the Government of India unless the Viceroy chooses to agree to their viewpoints. What obstacle was there to allow an immediate convention to grow that, although during the interim period the Viceroy might remain responsible to the Crown, the Viceroy would act on the advice of his Cabinet on all matters relating to the defence and welfare of India. We do not want mere Indianisation of the Viceroy's Council. We want both Indianisation and power. It was said that such a Cabinet could not be formed because then it would mean the tyrannical rule of the majority community over the minority. This was indeed a most mischievous suggestion. After all if a country is to have a National Cabinet, the majority must have a predominant voice in such Cabinet. The point is whether important minority interests have proper representation, and the Constitution has been so devised and worked that no community can

have legitimate complaint regarding any unfair or discriminatory treatment.

Regarding Defence Policy it is but natural that Indians want a clear assurance that they would have an effective voice in shaping, and administering the defence policy of India. To-day Indians want that they should be armed and trained for the purpose of defending their country against foreign aggression. Indians want that their country should be free and that Indians should control her affairs. They do not want any foreign control or invasion. They do not want a change of masters. Whatever their political viewpoint may be against the British, if Indians could have been trusted and properly trained for defence purpose, they would not only have been an invincible force against Japanese aggression but also have become the greatest pillar of support in defence of democracy and freedom throughout the world. We are told very often that Indians are not yet fit to guide and control the Defence Policy of their country. The reply to that is that unless Indians are actually placed in charge of National Defence, it is impossible to say whether they will prove a success or not. In any case looking at the reverses which Britain has suffered in Singapore, Malaya and Burma, is it not extremely hazardous for anyone to assert that if things were left to Indians, they would have done worse? It is obvious that the War Policy cannot be decided by India alone. The policy must

be determined by the Allied War Council and the Pacific War Council which would include representatives of a truly National Government in India. Such a Government however will have full power to mobilise all possible resources within the country for the effective defence of India.

The real truth is that in spite of sweet words, a deep distrust still surrounds the horizon. At this critical hour Britain's duty is simple and straightforward. If she really means that Indians should fight the Axis Powers with all her strength, there must be a clear declaration as regards the free status of India after the War, without any reference whatsoever to the mischievous possibility of breaking India into fragments. As regards the present, while India must have a free status, the National Government should be so constituted as to function in close collaboration with Great Britain and the Allied Powers during the War. The call should go forth to all the political parties to help in the formation of such a Government which must be trusted and given complete authority to administer Indian affairs according to India's needs. There may be sections here and there who may not come forward to join such a scheme. But there is not the least doubt that such a proposal will be welcomed by the people at large, and those who will keep away will either be dubbed as traitors or will soon disappear into the limbo of oblivion as persons

who failed to play the game when their country was in dire need of their loyal and devoted service. Real transfer of power and mutual trust,—these are the needs of the hour, if India is to fight and win a total war. Will Britain respond even at this late hour?

S. P. M.

## APPENDIX B.

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

*(Speech by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee at a public meeting held in Calcutta to consider the war situation on 20th June, 1940, presided over by the Governor of Bengal).*

We have just now passed a resolution re-affirming our desire to offer our assistance towards the attainment of victory. The resolution which I have the honour to move refers specifically to our anxiety that Bengal should be enabled to make her contribution both in trained men and materials for the successful prosecution of the War. The crisis that is hourly deepening in Europe only brings home to us our tragic helplessness to an ever-increasing degree. What assistance can we possibly render to others or to ourselves so long as a bold and far-reaching policy of training Bengalees in all branches of modern warfare is not resolutely carried into practice? It is not my purpose to dilate here on the disastrous effects of the military policy of the British Government in India which has left her men unarmed, untrained and defenceless. But if I just refer to the past, it is to ask for an immediate revision of Governmental policy. Bengalees along with other Indians must be

completely trusted and no obstacle whatsoever should be placed in their way to receive military training. If the existing legislative and parliamentary enactments stand in the way of Bengal or of any other province raising her national militia, the situation demands that necessary alterations should be made forthwith consistent with our country's claims and aspirations. Indians can never be satisfied with the present half-hearted policy of the authorities. We demand the right to defend our country. the right to arm ourselves just as free citizens of every free country are being allowed to-day in other parts of the world. Mere resolutions declaring our determination to fight for victory are meaningless when country after country is succumbing to the ruthless froces of the enemy. Publicity of news propaganda or formation of a civic guard may have their utilities under certain conditions. But the principal requirement is to make Indians feel by acts and not by mere words and resolutions that unrestricted facilities are being placed at their disposal to equip themselves for the defence of their motherland.

It is not by training alone that India can play her part in this time of crisis. The primary essential for modern warfare, whether offensive or defensive, is a powerful industrial apparatus. Here again an immediate change of policy is called for. There is hardly another country in the world richer than India in raw materials but hitherto these raw

materials have not been utilised to Indian's best advantage. India must be made self-sufficient in industry and manufacture not only in respect of arms and ammunitions but also in essential chemical and engineering industries, including aeroplanes and aero-engines, in meteorology, in communications, in power and liquid fuel. In this gigantic task of reconstruction we may have foreign experts brought out as occasions may demand but the services of Indian scientists and workers must be made available in an unrestricted manner. Work must commence in this direction in every province consistent with its resources. We do not accept the position that the task is either impossible or that it is already too late. Nothing is impossible and nothing is too late, only if the Government concerned moves solely and swiftly in India's national interests and with the combined support of all parties. The example of China in this connection is worth mentioning. With the help of foreign experts China has built up her war industries during the last two years in the midst of hard struggles with Japan. In spite of manifold difficulties full-fledged workshops for the manufacture of rifles, guns, cartridges, aeroplane-parts, explosives, motor-cars, lorries, telephone parts, radio-parts have been established in the West-part of China. If Government is anxious to secure the co-operation of India in defence, it must completely get over the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, take



Indians into their confidence and fully train and mobilise not only the man-power of India but also her latent scientific and industrial possibilities.

We are passing through a time which perhaps has had no parallel in history. The doctrine of 'Might is right' is now sought to be applied for the purpose of destruction of human civilization itself. While this meeting has resolved unconditionally to support the war, it is essential that a completely favourable atmosphere should be created immediately so that India may feel at heart that she is fighting for a cause which is no less sacred and dear to her than to any other fighting power. The Secretary of State for India spoke glowingly the other day in commemoration of the Magna Charta in England. If in 1215 England forced an unwilling King to sign the Magna Charta which she then claimed to be her birth-right, why should not England write a new chapter in the history of the world in 1940 and spontaneously grant to India her own Magna Charta and acknowledge her as a free country? Even at this late hour if a free India backed by a comprehensive programme of national defence can whole-heartedly join her hands with England and her Allies, it may well mark the birth of a new force capable of fighting to the bitter end for the preservation of democracy and freedom. What is wanted at this crisis is bold and statesmenlike

action that may at once capture the hearts of millions of Indians and not any repetition of half-hearted announcements based on rusty doctrines of power and prestige. In their own interests and for the peace of the world, Indians and Britishers can and must stand shoulder to shoulder on a footing of perfect equality and fight for the attainment of a common cause.

No proposals for national defence can succeed in Bengal unless we are prepared to sink our differences and work together in as a spirit of true comradeship. I do not wish to conceal from you that the Hindus of Bengal have been subjected to grievous wrongs and their confidence in the sense of justice and fairplay of the authorities has been rudely shaken; they will certainly demand for their redress at the appropriate time. Nor do I wish to conceal from you, who represent the Crown in this province, that to-day there exist genuine fears in the minds of a large section of Hindus in Bengal that the War-situation may so develop as to render their lives and properties specially unsafe. I resolutely hope that our fears may prove groundless and to you personally I make this appeal that so long as you are called upon to discharge the onerous duties of Governor of Bengal you will ensure that in these times of acute crisis, the administration of the province in every sphere is carried on in a spirit of good-will and fairplay so that all persons, me

women, Indians and Europeans alike may confidently join hands and pursue a constructive policy of national defence which will not only bring peace and honour to Bengal but will enable her to contribute worthily to the noble cause of making the world safe for freedom and democracy.

